Darkness sets in when she speaks about rumours that her unreciprocated love drove Guru Dutt to his death... "Guru Dutt was a depressed man," she says with unbelievable detachedness. "*Pyaasa* was a hit and *Kaagaz Ke Phool*, a flop. He would say, 'I have experienced both success and failure. If I live longer, I will only re-experience the same emotions. What is life?' By the time *Sahib, Bibi Aur Ghulam* came about, he had sunk into a deep depression. When we heard the news of his death, it did not come as a surprise. We expected it. No one accused us of exploiting each other professionally. Some relationships cannot be explained or understood," she ends delicately.

Equally delicately Tarun Dutt reveals, "My parents did have their share of rows but in spite of everything, they loved each other dearly and they were crazy about us kids. My father and mother were basically of the same nature – both egoistic, temperamental professionals and this was the root cause of their frequent clashes. My mother may have resented giving up a successful singing career for her family and kids. My father's family was very opportunistic in their approach towards my mother. Initially, they were very affectionate towards her because she was a singer but as soon as my father became a name in right, they treated her very shabbily.

"Through all this, my father did not neglect us any way. He was the best father one could have," says a fiercely loyal Tarun. "I don't remember Waheeda Rehman ever coming home or meeting her at any function. My father was very, very discreet and tried his best to keep us out of it.

"Waheeda was not the major cause of his depression," Tarun avers. "They broke up in '61. Films my father had banked heavily on, bombed. My mother had decided to separate from him, taking us with her. My father went through the pain of being torn between two women he loved. He was a very lonely man during his last years at his Peddar Road flat."

On October 1, 1964, Guru Dutt met Geeta at her father's residence. They decided to give their marriage another chance for the sake of their children. A few days later fate played a cruel trick and life for them was never the same again...

☆ **Nichola Pais**

UNFORGETTABLE

AFTER THE STORM...

Raakhee has held on tight, and today it's smooth, spun-gold sunshine that lights the life of this melancholic beauty.

Recently, cinegoers were treated to a glimpse of this beautiful actress in the film *Ek Rishta*. And a lovely moment it was too, seeing Raakhee playing matriarch opposite Amitabh Bachchan's dignified patriarch, matching him perfectly in deportment and strength. This is the face of Raakhee that endures today... Strong, dignified and definitely no tragedy queen.

In fact, Raakhee detests being compared with that glorious tragedienne, Meena Kumari... "How can they say that? No two people are alike, so there's no comparison. I'm an individual and just playing the same kind of tragic roles doesn't make me another Meena Kumari!"

The storms on the personal front seem to have finally died down. Two broken marriages and enormous responsibilities have taken their toll but Raakhee has survived. Today she stands alone but not lonely, on her own two feet and smiles... All the uncertainties of her past have combined to produce the woman she is today.

"The past, well, it's one's backbone," she says, "but one should avoid dwelling on it. One should always look ahead. Today will be yesterday and tomorrow, today... A woman needs to be totally self-sufficient – you never know what will happen tomorrow... To me, a woman libber is a woman who is not a doormat and can support a family as well as any man can."

Raakhee has provided an apt self-description in these couple of lines. Fact is, she became the earning member of her family at the age of 9. Childhood for her was bringing in the bread for the family and helping the others survive. Apparently, hearts would melt with sympathy for the beautiful nine-year-old who was seen carrying ex-film star Sandhya Roy's tray for hours on end, when she should have rightfully been laughing and playing with dolls.

It was only when she began earning enough to live like a queen that her childishness could emerge... On an annual holiday to London, despite vowing that she would never wear dresses again, she picked up 30 midis, that were all the rage there! "I may never wear them," she giggled to a friend, "but it's nice to have them!"

It was her film *Sharmilee*, which turned the tables so magnificently for Raakhee. "I was just a paying guest who wanted to make a living," she recalls, "Acting was just another avenue. Before that, it was modelling for Anacin, etc. When I lent my voice for the Bengali version of the ads, I charged extra. I was never conscious of my looks. I started with Satyenda's *Jeevan Mrityu*. Today when I chance to see it, I run away! My voice sounds so shrill and the hairdos were so funny!"

The success of *Sharmilee* in which she played a challenging double role set the ball rolling... "It had me shuttling between Madras and Bombay for *Paras*, *Janwar Aur Insaan* and other films. Of course, I had my share of miserable flops too: *Wafa*, *Sab Ke Saathi*, *Pugli*, *Shaadi Ke Baad*... but I take full responsibility for them."

Similarly, she takes full responsibility for her infamous moods... "It's true," she says, "I avoid people I don't want to speak to. But first ask them what they've done to me and why I avoid them. Yes, I try my best to avoid giving interviews. I've always been misquoted by journalists – I say one thing, they write another. I am basically an introvert, I don't communicate or make friends easily. That's why an interview bothers me. The same questions repetitively asked over the years..."

"Everyone has moods," she maintains. "On some days you do get depressed. When I'm in a good mood I'm very happy and I laugh a lot. And when I'm in a bad mood, I'm like a cabbage!"

The world has raved over Raakhee's pathos-filled, sensitive portrayals, but the actress herself brushes aside this lavish praise... "Acting has become totally mechanical with me, " she says. "I don't believe all this nonsense of getting into the role. As for genuinely crying for a scene minus glycerine, it's foolish. You'll spoil your eyes!"

Similarly, she claims she gave her best romantic close-ups, "without my hero, looking at a tree! I don't believe in 'getting to know' my heroes. That's just an excuse to flirt!"

On a more serious note she continues, "My acting is purely instinctive. Yes, I remember my dialogues but I don't prepare myself for the shot. At times, my grammar is faulty. I am unaware of the camera or crowds because when you give a good shot, you are alone."

Her pairing with Amitabh Bachchan was rated very highly. "People say we made the best screen pair. Our romance was so different, so dignified. There were no passionate embraces, except for a few in *Kabhi Kabhie*. We covered a gamut of emotions – sympathy, resentment, admiration in the 11-odd films we did together. There was a time we did three films in quick succession – *Kabhi Kabhie*, *Trishul* and *Kaala Patthar*. We were together night and day. Not once did I see him shout but I sensed he is short-tempered. I feel he had a lonely childhood. We vibed well from the first film we did together, perhaps our vibes originated in the loneliness we had known, before coming to the industry. We never had the time to get to know one another... I feel sorry about what remained unspoken."

Today, there's not much Raakhee feels sorry about. Film producers still coming knocking at her door and she has the liberty to pick and choose from among the offers. The light of her life, daughter Bosky (Meghna) is well settled and is also making her directorial debut. She has her farm where she enjoys such simple pleasures as growing potatoes. Yes, she lives and she loves...

☆ Nichola Pais